

Lake Phelps

Lake Phelps, the state's second largest natural lake, is a beautiful mystery. Formed on a vast peninsula lying between the Albemarle Sound and Pamlico River, the lake is believed to be more than 38,000 years old. Scientists have long puzzled its origin and have proposed many hypotheses, including underground springs, wind and wave action, meteor showers, peat burn and glacial activity. So far, no single explanation has gained universal acceptance.

Sitting at one of the highest elevations in the area, Lake Phelps has an unusual ecology. The lake is shallow with an average depth of 4.5 feet and a maximum depth of 9 feet. Its waters are clear while most area streams and lakes are murky. Not fed by streams, the lake depends upon rainfall, making it one of the cleanest lakes in North Carolina. Five miles across, Lake Phelps harbors many species of animals that usually do not thrive in such an environment. In addition, the lake's unique water quality may be the reason for its remarkable capacity to preserve wood.

When the plantations of Bonarva and Somerset Place were operating at their peaks, Lake Phelps was much larger. Its waters lapped at the edge of the carriage road. The old waterline can still be seen where the land slopes away from the family campground. Lake Phelps continues to get smaller.

Contributing to lower water levels are a long-term rainfall shortage, the need to pump water from the lake to fight forest fires, deposits of wind-blown sediment filling the lake and any lake's natural disposition to dry up. Still, Lake Phelps has thousands of years left, so enjoy it leisurely. View it from the piers at the boat ramp, the overlooks near the Bee Tree and Moccasin canals, the observation tower at the Pocosin Natural Area or the fishing pier at Cypress Point.



Scuppernong River

Park visitors can explore the Scuppernong River section of Pettigrew State Park by paddling these slow flowing waters. This journey will take one through an undeveloped landscape that was historically used for transportation by various cultural groups from the American Indians to founders of Somerset Place.

There are several access points to the Scuppernong River. N.C. Wildlife boat ramps both at Creswell and Columbia offer easy entry to this body of water and areas are provided for parking, as well. Or access points can be found from many small creeks.

Flora and Fauna

The mighty trees at Pettigrew aren't just big. They're prize-winning big. Throughout previous years, shagbark hickory, various bay trees, sweet gum, poplars, black gums and pawpaws have been noted among the largest of their species. The trunk of several bald cypress trees measure up to 10 feet in diameter and poplar trunks exceed six feet. Five species have trunks more than five feet in diameter.

Wildflowers lend color and beauty to the forests of Pettigrew. Atamasco lily, Jack-in-the-pulpit, jewelweed, buttercup, mist flower and periwinkle are often seen. Displays of different wildflowers are present from early spring through late summer. Be sure to keep an eye out for these interesting and beautiful showings of nature.

Ducks, geese and swans use Lake Phelps and adjoining woodlands as a primary wintering ground, making the park a great place for bird watching, especially during the months of December and January. Owls and hawks perch on the limbs of Pettigrew's giant trees and feast on rodents in adjacent corn and soybean fields. The lakeshore provides a habitat for kingfishers, herons, egrets and a host of other avians who seek food at the water's edge. Catch a glimpse of numerous mammals including opossum, fox, bobcat, raccoon, mink, muskrat and otter. In addition, bear and deer can be seen along the ecotone between farmland and pocosin habitats. The Lake Phelps area is also part of the red wolf reintroduction program and red wolf can occasionally be seen.

Pettigrew State Park includes 500 acres of pocosin habitat that was never bulldozed during the massive land clearings of the 1960s and 1970s. The park manages a small area of this pocosin, protecting its carnivorous plants — sundews and bladderworts.

Explore nearby Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. Adjacent to Lake Phelps, this plant and animal sanctuary contains more than 111,000 acres. A dense growth of evergreen shrubs and scattered pond pines, typical of a pocosin, populates the area.

Along N.C. 94, motorists can view large numbers of pitcher plants and dwarf pond pines. Bordering numerous bodies of water — including Frying Pan Lake, Lake Phelps, New Lake, Pungo Lakes and the Alligator and Scuppernong rivers — the refuge is an excellent place to view waterfowl.

Picnicking

A large cypress grove supplies plenty of shade for picnicking and offers the perfect setting for gatherings. Visitors may choose from individual picnic sites that are available on a first-come, first-served basis or reserve the picnic shelter including eight tables. Grills are provided throughout this area along with water and restrooms located nearby. A grassy field located nearby creates a great playground for all ages.

A smaller picnic shelter is located at the Cypress Point Access of Pettigrew State Park and is available for reservations.

A full service, online and call center-based reservations system is being developed and will be unveiled summer 2009. Check the Web site for more details www.ncparks.gov.

Camping



Family camping: The family campground is located between the park office and Somerset Place. Thirteen campsites, each with a picnic table and grill, are well-suited for tents and trailers.

The edge of a cypress/sweetgum forest furnishes a shaded area for some of the Lake Phelps campsites while others are located in an open, grassy meadow. Water and restrooms with showers are nearby. A fee is charged for the campsites, which are available on a first-come basis.

Group camping: Opportunities for outdoor learning abound in the group camping area. Located in the midst of a beautiful forest, primitive camping facilities include tent pads, grills, vault toilets and potable water. To ensure availability of the group camping area, reservations are advised.

Fishing

Lake Phelps is known throughout the east for its bass fishing. The lake teems with largemouth bass, yellow perch and pumpkinseed. Enjoy the challenges of pickerel and catfish as the Algonquians did 10,000 years ago.

Try your luck on the pier or boardwalk at Cypress Point. Wade fishermen can enter Lake Phelps at the Pocosin Overlook.

Anglers must have a fishing license and obey regulations of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.



Boating

Canoes, kayaks, rowboats and power vessels have ample room to enjoy Lake Phelps. The lake offers ideal conditions for sailing in shallow draft boats. Launch a canoe from Cypress Point or use the boat ramp behind the park office.

A canoe trail winds through the park's nearby waterways, offering paddlers the chance to view the area's environment up close. Maps of the trail are available at the park office.

History Highlights

From the mysterious origin of Lake Phelps to the present day, Pettigrew has a rich and fascinating history. Artifacts reveal the presence of American Indians as early as 8,000 B.C. Archaeologists have uncovered pottery and projectile points. The most fascinating discovery is a collection of dugout canoes — 30 at last count — found sunken in the lake.

American Indians made dugout canoes by burning the interiors of cypress logs and scraping away the charred wood until only the shells remained. Archaeologists believe that the Algonquian Indians, who were seasonal hunters in the area, sank their canoes in the lake to store and protect them until the next hunting season.

One of the canoes is 37 feet in length, the longest American Indian dugout canoe in the southeastern U.S. Another is the second oldest in the nation, radiocarbon dated to be 4,390 years old. Two canoes are on display in the park's information center.

Before colonists discovered Lake Phelps in 1755, area residents called the area the Great Eastern Dismal and the Great Alligator Dismal. The wilderness was so fearsome that explorers refused to enter its borders. History maintains that a group of hunters ventured in to hunt and to look for farmland. Most of the men turned back but just as the remaining few were about to leave, Benjamin Tarkington climbed a tree and saw a lake nearby. His companion, Josiah Phelps, ran into the lake while Tarkington was still up in the tree. The first in the water, he claimed the right to name it Lake Phelps.

Josiah Collins, who immigrated to the U.S. from England, developed the area surrounding Lake Phelps. He and his partners in the Lake Company drained the swamp, transforming the land into productive agricultural fields and prosperous plantations.

In 1787, Collins established Somerset Place, named for his home county of Somersetshire in England. He brought slaves to dig a six-mile canal connecting Lake Phelps with the Scuppernong River. The canal served as both a transportation route and a channel for draining the swampland between the river and Lake Phelps. Later, Collins developed an extensive system of canals with locks to irrigate the area's corn and rice crops.

The Civil War brought an end to the prosperity of Somerset Place. Unable to maintain it, the Collins family sold the plantation. It passed through several owners until the Federal Farm Security Administration acquired it in 1937. Today, Somerset Place is a state historic site occupying eight acres of land within Pettigrew State Park. Tour historic Somerset Place and experience life in the antebellum South. The N.C. Department of Cultural Resources maintains the historic home and grounds.

One of the Confederacy's great generals, James Johnston Pettigrew is buried a mile east of Somerset off the carriage road. Gen. Pettigrew, for whom the park is named and his family left an indelible mark upon the history of the state. Pettigrew led the North Carolina troop's famous charge at Gettysburg. He died two weeks before his 35th birthday from wounds received during Gen. Robert E. Lee's retreat after the battle. Gen. Pettigrew, his father and grandfather are buried in the oak-shaded cemetery.



Next to Somerset Place is what was once the Pettigrew family farm, Bonarva. All that now remains of the plantation, built by Pettigrew's grandfather in 1790, is some rubble near the carriage road and several large trees planted by the family. But in the 1830s, Bonarva was nationally recognized as a model of scientific farming and management.

Upon their purchase by the Federal Farm Security Administration, the Collins mansion and surrounding land were incorporated into the Scuppernong Farms Resettlement Project. The state gained control of the land in a 99-year lease with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and in 1939 Pettigrew became the sixth state park in North Carolina.

Trails

In the days of the plantation, the Collins family enjoyed carriage rides on a promenade that passed Somerset Place and Bonarva and followed along the shore of Lake Phelps. Today, the carriage road makes up a portion of the Bee Tree Trail. Beginning at the park office, a one-mile section winds past the campground and Somerset Place. After wandering through a sweetgum forest, the trail leads to Bee Tree Overlook, a wooden platform offering a view of the lake and a place to observe wintering waterfowl. Between the site of Bonarva and the canal is a short trail leading to Pettigrew Cemetery.

Moccasin Trail leads northwest from the park office for approximately three miles to Moccasin Canal. After traveling through a cypress and hardwood forest, the trail stops at a 350-foot boardwalk, which cuts through a cypress swamp to Moccasin Overlook. This view of Big Point is one of the most impressive vistas in the area. Morotoc Trail continues from the overlook to Cypress Point. Cypress Point is located seven miles from the park office. Bicycles are allowed on parts of the trail.

The Pocosin Natural Area has a short trail to an observation tower and carnivorous plant management area. See the park map for distance and difficulty.

Nature's Classroom

Regularly scheduled educational and interpretive programs about Pettigrew State Park are conducted for the public and special groups. Contact the park office to arrange a special exploration of Pettigrew State Park for your group or class.

In addition, educational materials about Pettigrew State Park have been developed for grades 4-8 and are correlated to North Carolina's competency-based curriculum in science, social studies, mathematics and English/language arts. This curriculum introduces students to archaeological research and also focuses on the significance of Lake Phelps, hypothesis testing, preservation of cultural resources along with different facets of American Indian life. Accompanying the program is a teacher's booklet and workshop, free of charge to educators.

Rules & Regulations

Make your visit a safe and rewarding experience. Some of our rules are posted throughout the park for the protection of our park and our visitors. A complete list is available at the park office. Help preserve our natural resources by observing the following:

- ☐ The removal of any plant, animal, artifact or mineral is prohibited.
- ☐ State parks are wildlife preserves. Hunting is prohibited.
- ☐ All boating and fishing regulations of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission are enforced.
- ☐ The possession or consumption of alcoholic beverages is prohibited.
- ☐ Do not litter. Help maintain a clean environment by placing trash in proper receptacles. State law requires aluminum cans to be placed in recycling containers.
- ☐ Firearms and fireworks are not permitted.
- ☐ Observe the posted campground quiet hours.
- ☐ Camping is allowed in designated areas by permit only.
- ☐ Keep all pets on a leash no longer than six feet.

For Your Safety

To prevent accidents, please remember these safety tips.

- ☐ Do not feed or approach wildlife. North Carolina is experiencing a rise in rabies cases. Report sick or aggressive animals to rangers.
- ☐ Be alert to approaching storms. Lake Phelps waters can become rough very suddenly.
- ☐ You may be boating in unfamiliar waters. Exercise cautious seamanship.
- ☐ Do not water ski in boat-launching or pier areas.

Contact park staff for other safety tips or for an explanation of park rules.

Welcome!

With more than 4,000 acres of land and 16,600 acres of water, Pettigrew State Park is an ideal blend of nature, history and recreation.

Explore Lake Phelps and examine dugout canoes as ancient as the Egyptian pyramids. Or cast your line into crystal-clear waters where largemouth bass reign. Take a trip back in time at the grave of a great Confederate general. Or perhaps, simply paddle down the Scuppernong River in search of waterfowl and great Atlantic white cedars.

Pettigrew exhibits its history among picturesque natural surroundings. Majestic cypress trees tower above as the branches of tulip poplar and swamp chestnut oak provide perches for songbirds. Wildflowers decorate the landscape with a splash of color.



Information

To learn more about Pettigrew State Park, contact:

Pettigrew State Park
2252 Lake Shore Road
Creswell, NC 27928
(252) 797-4475
pettigrew@ncmail.net
www.ncparks.gov

Discover other North Carolina state parks and recreation areas, contact:

N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation
Dept. of Environment and Natural Resources
1615 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1615
(919) 733-4181

For information about Somerset Place, contact:

Somerset Place State Historic Site
2572 Lake Shore Road
Creswell, NC 27928
(252) 797-4560

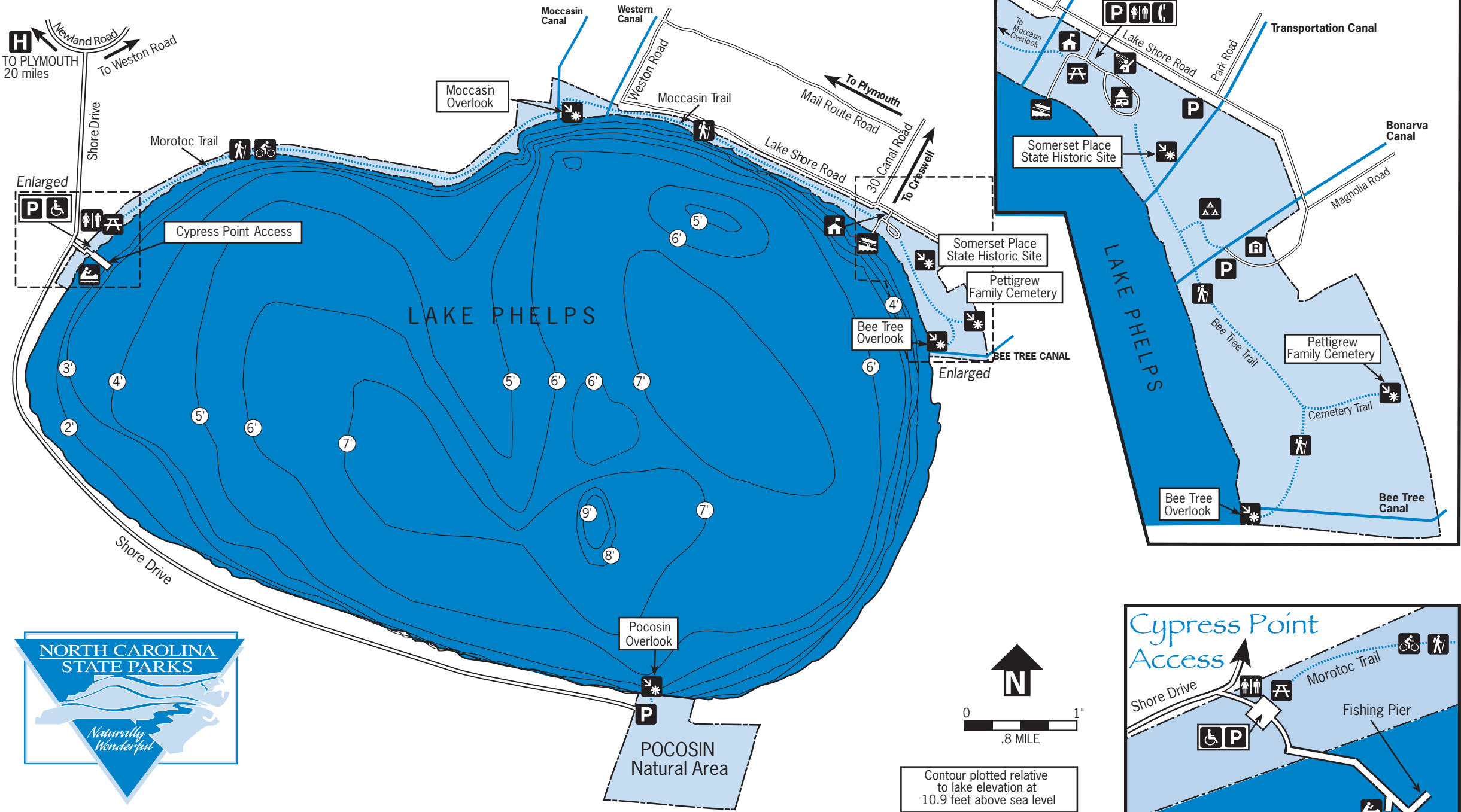
For information about Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, contact:

Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge
Post Office Box 329
Columbia, NC 27925
(252) 796-3004

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Pettigrew State Park



Legend

Accessible	Hiking Trail	Restrooms
Bicycle Trail	Park Office	Road
Boat Ramp	Parking	Washhouse
Boundary Line	Picnic Area	Washington County Hospital
Canoe Launch	Point of Interest	Emergencies - 911
Family Camping	Public Telephone	⑥ Water depth contour relative to 10.9 feet above sea level.
Group Camping	Ranger Residence	

Trails

Cemetery Trail	.34 miles
Bee Tree Trail	1.3 miles
Moccasin Trail	2.8 miles
Morotoc Trail	4.2 miles

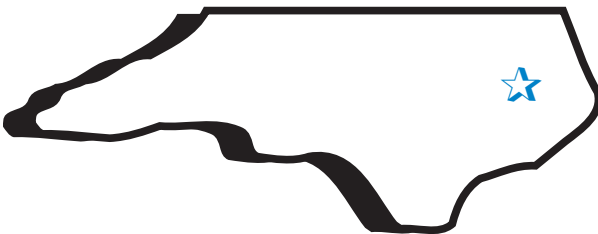
All trails are rated as easy.

N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation
Department of Environment and Natural Resources



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Pettigrew State Park is located in Washington and Tyrrell counties, seven miles south of Creswell off U.S. 64.

Park Hours

November-February	8 a.m. - 6 p.m.
March - May, September & October	8 a.m. - 8 p.m.
June-August	8 a.m. - 9 p.m.
Closed Christmas Day	